

INCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Boeing 737-200A, 9H-ABA	
No & Type of Engines:	2 Pratt & Whitney JT8D-15A turbofan engines	
Year of Manufacture:	1983	
Date & Time (UTC):	20 October 1993 at 2016 hrs	
Location:	London Gatwick Airport	
Type of Flight:	Public Transport	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 6	Passengers - 95
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	None	
Commander's Licence:	Airline Transport Pilot's Licence (Malta)	
Commander's Age:	46 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	13,180 hours (of which 2,408 hours were on type) Last 90 days - 110 hours Last 24 hours - Nil	
Information Source:	AAIB Formal Investigation	

The aircraft departed Luqa International Airport, Malta at 1658 hrs on 20 October 1993 on an international public transport passenger flight to London/Gatwick Airport. The First Officer was the handling pilot for this sector and the cruise was uneventful. The aircraft first contacted the London Air Traffic Control Centre (LATCC) Lydd Sector controller at 1940 hrs when descent clearance was issued. At this time the London Gatwick Automatic Terminal Information Service (ATIS) was broadcasting information which was coded 'Echo' and which reported that the active runway at London Gatwick was 26L. Advice was added that operations were due to be changed to Runway 26R at 2000 hrs. The flight crew reported to ATC that they had received this information.

The descent proceeded normally and at 1954 hrs the Gatwick Approach controller instructed the aircraft to take up the Eastwood holding pattern at FL 80 and advised the crew to expect radar vectoring for a Surveillance Radar Approach (SRA) to London Gatwick Runway 26R. At this time London Gatwick ATIS information coded 'Foxtrot' was broadcasting the change to the operational runway and the broadcast also ended, as normal, with advice on the runway lighting that crews should expect to see. This advice was "RUNWAY IN USE 26R, WITH WHITE APPROACH AND EDGE LIGHTS - 26R SPECIAL PROCEDURES IN OPERATION."

At 2004 hrs the Gatwick Approach controller instructed the aircraft to descend and provided radar vectors to enable it to route via Mayfield towards the extended centreline of Runway 26R. Control was transferred to Gatwick Radar at 2008 hrs and the controller advised that he would provide an SRA terminating at 2 nm before touchdown. At 2012 hrs the aircraft intercepted the extended centreline for Runway 26R and, at 6 nm from touchdown, the controller advised that it should descend to maintain a 3° glide path. Evidence from the Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) indicates that at 6 nm from touchdown the First Officer reported seeing the lights and then, at 4 nm, asked the commander to confirm where the runway was and asked "IS IT THE ONE ON THE RIGHT?" The commander replied, "YES ITS THE ONE ON THE RIGHT, THE ONE WITH THE GREEN LIGHTS". The First Officer confirmed that he could see the green lights and, at 2 nm range, control was transferred to Gatwick Tower when final landing clearance was approved. After landing and when the aircraft had been brought to a halt, the Gatwick Tower controller advised the flight crew that they had not landed on Runway 26R but had instead landed on Taxiway 2. The aircraft was subsequently taxied to the terminal area where all crew and passengers disembarked through the normal channels.

The Chief Inspector of Air Accidents has ordered a Formal Investigation into the circumstances of this serious incident.

Initial investigation has shown that the incident occurred when the aircraft made a landing on Taxiway 2 because the flight crew mistakenly believed it to be Runway 26R. In April 1988 a similar incident occurred when a BAC 1-11 was landed in the opposite direction on Taxiway 2 because the flight crew mistakenly believed it to be Runway 08L. The similarities between the two incidents are marked. The BAC 1-11 crew were experienced and familiar with operating at London Gatwick, although neither pilot had ever landed on Runway 08L. The crew in this incident were well experienced and familiar with operating at London Gatwick both by day and night. Neither pilot had landed before on Runway 26R or 08L. In both incidents the flight crews were aware that the northern runway (26R/08L) was active at the time, but nevertheless convinced themselves that Taxiway 2, with its standard green centreline lighting was the northern runway and landed on it.

The following initial safety recommendation has therefore been made to the CAA:

Recommendation 93-66

The lighting of runways and taxiways at London/Gatwick Airport should be re-examined with particular reference to the elimination of any possible confusion for pilots identifying Runway 26R/08L and Taxiway 2. Recommended modifications include:

- a Rendering the green centreline lights of Taxiway 2 invisible to pilots on approach to runway 26R/08L.

b The removal of the white strobe lights sited either side of Runway 26L/08R, which were originally installed to assist in the identification of this runway when 26R/08L was commissioned, leaving the strobe lights at the thresholds of 26R/08L in order to facilitate its positive identification. (Issued 19 November 1993)